MOONSHINE

BY DOROTHY CANFIELD

AUTHOR OF "A PHILANTHROPIC HONEYMOON"

IN TWO PARTS—PART I

THE brightness of the moonlight was almost like something palpable. The park lay as if flooded with an actual outpouring of molten silver, and the little lake was turned to a quivering pool of mercury. All the unshaded parts of the gravel paths were plashed so broadly with the white light that they looked luminous and half-translucent, like the top of a fog, and the whole world seemed floating in an airy enchantment upon a bank of cloud. It was very still, the faint murmur of the surrounding city no louder than the half-heard sigh which stirred from time to time the trees drooping heavily above the solitary bench upon the lake-side.

The couple on the bench were as still as the rest of the world, entranced by the breathless magic of the night. Finally the girl, without breaking the statue-like immobility in which they sat, spoke in a low tone. "*Caro mio! Carissimo!* I have been counting, and I am just thirty-eight days old."

The man laughed, shattering the spell of muteness.

"What idea have you got in your funny little cocoanut now, Francesca?" he asked, moving closer to her.

The girl dropped her head back on his shoulder and gazed up at the moon.

"An Italian would have said 'Franceschina,'" she murmured dreamily; "but I like 'Francesca' best because you said it."

"I really ought to call you 'Fanny,' since you are goin' to quit bein' a dago," the man said jocosely, putting his arm about her familiarly. "What did you mean by that remark about bein' thirty-eight days old?"

"I mean, I've kept track of every time you have taken me out in the park in the evening, and this is the thirty-eighth time, and I only seem to have lived—really lived—those evenings. All the rest is like a dream, a bad dream that you wake me up from, *Carlo mio.*"

"This seems more like a dream to me," answered the other, indicating with a vague nod of his head the world of ensilvered bewitchery which lay about them. He turned suddenly to the girl, and drew her into a close and passionate embrace, kissing her in a sort of unsatisfied fury. Then he laughed again, and said:

"I have to make sure *you* are real and solid, and no dream!"

Francesca did not respond to this half-change into playfulness. She clung to him quivering, her dark eyes suffused with an ardor that shook her visibly.

"Oh! *Oh!*" she said in a low voice of tension. "My heart will break—I cannot bear it!"

"Oh, I won't be gone long this time; and maybe the firm will think I don't make good out there, and they'll send for me to come home, quick."

"No! No!" cried Francesca, in the same breathless agony of emotion. "I don't mean your going away. I *can* live with you away, for you will be coming back, and some day I shall go with you. I mean to-night—all times, but just to-night most, because you are going away to-morrow—I feel that I shall die if I cannot tell you what you are to me. I can't breathe without having said it, and yet there is no word—no word——"

She stopped, striking her hand upon her forehead in a sort of anguish. The

man possessed himself of both her hands and kissed them.

"I know, Fanny, just how 'tis," he said, his light manner hushed into a momentary gravity by her consuming fervor. "But I guess we both know how the other one feels without any need to tell it."

"No, you can't! You can't! See. To me you are everything—everything—and when Aunt Giuseppina goes back to Italy, I will have nobody but you in all this world of America."

"That is sort o' hard on you, poor little girl! But maybe we can go over there and visit your folks, some time."

"It is *not* hard," contradicted the girl, stirring restlessly in his arms. "That is just what I am trying to say. I like it! I'm glad I've nobody but you. I'm glad I never knew my father and mother. I'm glad Aunt Giuseppina never let me make any friends all the time we have been here. I wouldn't want to waste a thought on them, now that I have you. I feel as though all my life I have been saving and saving my love, and never having to give it to any one but the Blessed Virgin, just so that I can give it all to you—all, all! I don't want to waste any living, even, and this summer, the times between the evenings we've spent here or I've been with you, I've tried not to see or hear or know anything—just to sit still over my embroidery and see again the moon over the lake and feel your arms about me."

She stopped short, as if stricken retrospectively with this still mood, and there was a long silence. Then she sighed deeply.

"I'm afraid we should be going in, *Carlo mio*. Aunt Giuseppina is so angry if I'm later than ten."

The young man gave her a final caress, and then drew out his watch.

"It's ten now, Fanny, dear. She's as mad as can be a'ready, and a little more can't hurt her. Let's celebrate my last evening here by taking a ride on the lake."

"Oh, *caro,* I don't like to displease poor old Zia Giuseppina, who's been so good to me always ever since we came to this country. It was she who saw that I learned embroidery of the sisters, so that I have never had to work in a factory with dreadful people; and she made me learn good English at the convent, too, so that now I can talk to you, dear, though you do laugh at it and say it sounds as though I were reading a book to you. And most of all, it was she who let me go to the fair at Our Lady of Mount Carmel, where Father Ryan introduced us to each other. We owe it all to my aunt, *amato mio!*"

"Well, that's one way of lookin' at it," returned the man with a whimsical gravity. "But as to your embroidery, you're goin' to drop that as soon as you're Mrs. Devlin, and you're goin' to learn some good New York talk as soon as I can teach it to you. As far as the last good thing your aunt handed out to you goes, I can't say I've noticed she's loved Father Ryan any, for introducing Charlie Devlin to the Marinetto family. Come on, let's go!"

The girl hesitated, but said finally:

"Well, she can't kill me, I suppose, though when she scolds it is nearly as bad. She scolds so much these days!"

"Don't like your American beau, does she?" said the other, leading her down to the boat-house. "Well, I'll soon be out of sight where I won't bother her any!"

As they walked along the board wharf, Francesca said timidly:

"She has a new idea now about me. The family in Italy want me to—no!" she exclaimed in a sudden indignation, "I won't even *tell* you what they want me to do!"

"Suit yourself about it," said Charlie, with a facetiously tender intonation, helping her into a boat. "Here, you sit on the seat with me and help row. I'm not goin' to do *all* the work."

She laughed a little at this sally, and sat down docilely. The moonlight poured upon her bare head, burnishing the black braids until they shone like a bird's wing, and the white radiance reflected from the water made the clear paleness of her oval face glimmer like a lily.

"You're an awful pretty girl, do you know it?" said her companion, looking at her indulgently as he pulled the boat's prow about and headed for the opposite bank. "Only you look so pale.

It's pretty, but somehow it don't seem quite healthy. I like to see a girl look real hearty; but I'd like you any way you looked."

Francesca turned her large, dark eyes upon him with so piercing a look of devotion that he put out his hands and took hers tightly in a hot clasp.

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated, releasing her at last. "I'm awfully in love with you! I hope the firm raises my salary quick. I'm goin' to make a success of that job in Wranston or bust!"

They turned a curve in the winding lake, and came upon an expanse of water so dazzlingly resplendent with moonlight that they exclaimed as if they saw it for the first time.

"It gets worse and more of it, don't it, little girl?"

"The moon belongs to us, Charlie. It cannot ever have looked down on any other lovers as on us—not even on that other Francesca who loved and was unhappy. I love and am happy, and the moon has just come to be part of it. I can't look at it without feeling so joyful that I am hurt. It is almost two months ago since that first moon in July."

She fell into a reverie again, which was not interrupted even by the end of their excursion. Like one in a dream she stepped out on the wharf and walked beside her companion out of the park, and into a street, at first silent with the summer sleep of handsome houses on each side, but soon teeming with the ant-like activity of a poor quarter of New York in the heated season. Finally the man spoke.

"We're pretty nearly home, Fanny, and it's good-by, you know."

She gave him a face radiant and ecstatic.

"Oh, don't think of that! We'll have plenty of time to know that, to-morrow. Now I'm walking along beside you, and that's enough to make me happy." Then, with a sudden thought: "Oh, Carlo, you won't forget to look up Uncle Matteo in Wranston, will you? Aunt Giuseppina spoke again about him. I've only seen him twice, but Italians think so much of relationships."

They turned up a flight of steps and stood in the dark entry-way to the flat-house. Francesca's eyes gleamed soft in the moonlight, which shot a long silver arrow in after them.

"See how brave I am!" she said. "I can say good-by without breaking down. I would always be brave if I could help you. I live only to be what you would like—no, to be what is truly and truly best for you; and I pray Madonna every hour that I may know what is best. But now to be brave is best, and see. . . . . !"

Indeed, although she clung pitifully to him as the farewells were said, she stood smiling at him as he went down the steps, a white, exalted smile which awed the man into a fit of musing so profound that he did not hear his name called as he turned the corner of the street. Some one touched him on the arm and pointed back. He came to himself with a start, and saw Francesca running after him, calling his name, and scattering unheeding the crowds of strolling passers-by.

The still and uplifted fervor of her face was changed to a frantic agitation. Regardless of the crowds about them, she fell into his arms, sobbing wildly.

"Oh, I thought—the moon went under a cloud—see, it is all dark! I thought—I felt that *you are going away!*"

"So I am, you foolish little thing! I can't go to Wranston and stay in New York at the same time, can I?" He began to lead her back, trying to quiet her.

"No, I don't mean just going away from New York. I mean *really* going away—going away from me! All at once I felt—as if somebody had struck me—that you are going away from *me!*"

"The moonshine has turned your head. It's given you fancies," he said tenderly, putting his arm about her gently.

They had reached the steps again. At this remark she said, with a return of her uncontrollable excitement:

"But there is no moonshine any more—see how dark it is! There isn't a ray!"

"It's only so that the entry-way will be good and dark, and the janitor can't see how many times I kiss you good-by," he said, trying to make light of her

fears, although his own eyes were wet with tears of facile, responsive, nervous emotion, and his voice quivered a little.

It was indeed so dark that they could not see each other at all; and he carried away with him no recollection of the girl but the yielding softness of her tender body in his arms, the quivering fever of her lips, and the tear-wet coolness of her cheeks.

II

THE next time he stepped into the entry it was with snow powdering his overcoat, and he began the long climb up the dark stairs with tingling fingers and ears. He noticed how bad the air was.

"Heavens!" he said to himself. "How the dagos do smell of garlic! I should think Fanny could make her aunt live in a better house. My clothes will smell to heaven when I get back to Wranston!"

A door on the floor above him was opened, there was a moment's rustling attention over the rail, and then a little scream.

"Carlo! Carlo!" cried Francesca, running down the stairs, "I never dreamed you'd be so early. I'm not dressed yet, but I couldn't wait!"

She flung herself into his arms, one long, hanging braid striking heavily against his hand. A wave of emotion swept over the young man as he felt the familiar clinging touch of her soft body and the ardent warmth of her lips. He was surprised at the quickened beating of his heart, and at the unexpected poignant thrust of delight which pierced him. The unlooked-for suddenness of her appearance had shaken him to the depths.

"Oh, Francesca!" he said softly, holding her at arm's-length for a moment and gazing at her in the dim light. "Oh, Francesca, how lovely you are!"

"Carlo, Carlo! It has been an eternity since you left—an eternity!"

"*Francesca, venga qui, tu!*" came from above, harshly.

The girl started apprehensively.

"Yes, Zia Giuseppina, I didn't mean to—but I heard him coming!"

They entered the tiny room, gaudy with tinsel and coarse white lace, with a cheap shrine to the Virgin in one corner. Aunt Giuseppina and Charlie surveyed each other with a mutual disfavor which was as profound as it was open. Francesca hovered agitatedly between them.

"*Oh, cara zia! Carlo caro!*" she murmured imploringly.

"You call me Charlie. I'm no dago!" said the man, his eyes on the old Italian woman, her deeply lined face severe under its flaunting head-dress. "Now, go and put your hair up, and then come back and visit with me. Your aunt and I can entertain each other for a few minutes, I guess."

The old woman drew so deep a breath that her neckerchief opened its folds and showed for a moment the full design of the gaudy pattern; but she said nothing, turning away into the next room in a complete and eloquent silence. Francesca drew near timidly.

"You don't mind poor old Zia Giuseppina, do you? She's so old-fashioned and Italian. It's not you she doesn't like, it's just any American. She is afraid you won't be good to me. She tells me all the time, scolding, that you don't really love me, that only Italians can love."

Her two great braids hung down over her loose wrapper, open a little at the throat, and loose strands of shining hair fell in a pretty confusion over her soft, black eyes. She looked so intimately appealing that the young man felt his heart soften again, and drew her to him in a sudden gust of affection.

"Lord! It's good to see you, Fanny!" he said with an accent half tender, half surprised.

She drew herself away archly, smiling at him in an ineffable happiness that was infinitely touching.

"No, I'm not fit to be seen. You're ahead of time, and so you must wait, long, long—till I have on my new dress that I made just for to-night."

She slipped away like a shadow, and the young man was left to himself. He continued smiling for a moment, his even, white teeth showing pleasantly under his blond mustache; then he drew a long breath of the close atmosphere, and looked about him, frowning. After a vain attempt to open a window, he took

off his overcoat and sat down on a bright red plush chair to wait. In the next room he could hear the old woman moving heavily about, and whiffs of cooking cabbage came in through the ill-fitting door. How long it was since he had been in one of these frightful little flats! In Wranston every one had a house of his own.

He compared the stuffy little room, full of foolish and meaningless ornaments and reeking with garlic, to the parlors of the well-to-do houses in Wranston where he had come to feel so much at home. He wondered why he had never noticed before how singularly unattractive and vulgar it was. Then he remembered that he had scarcely ever come in, but had only stopped for Francesca on the way to their moonlight walks in the park. He wondered if that would not be possible now. It was cold, the last of November, but anything would be better than staying in the flat.

He stepped to the window and looked out. The snow had stopped falling, and the stars shone faintly, almost extinguished in the radiance of the rising moon, showing with cruel bareness the square, ugly roof-tops of the houses all about. He fell into a reverie, thinking of a sleighing party in Wranston which had been arranged for that evening by the set of young people who had taken him in. He had missed the party by coming to New York. It would be a beautiful night for it, he thought. They would probably end up with a chafing-dish supper in Maggie Wright's handsome dining-room.

He was surprised to realize how familiar a picture was presented to his mind by the thought. Was it possible that he had been in Wranston but three months? It was like the revelation of a new world to him, a world of pleasure-loving, prosperous, easy-living folk, who had accepted him with unthinking, good-natured carelessness, content that he was presentable and cheerful. At first they had dazzled him by their appearance of prosperity. It seemed like a dream to him, fresh from the East Side, to be received on these wide, comfortable piazzas, littered with a luxurious array of wickerwork chairs and bright cushions. He felt ill at ease, as if he were sailing under false colors, as if he might be found out at any moment.

But little by little he had come to realize that these self-sufficient, high-colored young ladies, who drove him out to the Country Club in pseudo-smart equipages, consisting of lofty, red-wheeled dog-carts drawn by the peaceable family horse—that these hard-voiced, good-natured, ambitious girls were made of the same stuff as the shop-girls in New York who had composed his feminine acquaintance before he met Francesca. He came to be sure that they speculated about his probable prospects in business with the same careful shrewdness that their sisters in the city shops had shown. He came to know the history of the town, and to learn that the fathers of these showy families had begun much lower on the commercial ladder than he was.

Indeed, he was succeeding admirably in the mission on which his company had sent him. His popularity with the "society life" of the town aided him greatly; his firm had advanced his salary steadily, and given him responsibility beyond his hopes. He began to feel the stirring of ambition, the true American desire to get on in the world, to raise himself in the social scale. He was no longer a salesman, he was head of a branch establishment, although but a small one; and a realization of the possibilities of his position came to him in a dizzying rush. Now that he had a start, with his business ability, he could be anything he chose.

Smiling, he remembered his awe at the first of the Wranston homes he entered, and his respect for the extreme ease and self-possession of the daughter of the house. He had come a long way since then. Now he felt himself their equal—potentially their superior. They came of no better stock than his Irish-American forebears. He recognized the same breaks of uneasy self-distrust in the glittering and apparently smooth surface of their self-satisfaction which had tormented him. They, too, were afraid of being found out. To their daunting material prosperity he found that he could successfully oppose his city origin. They asked his opinion about social matters, and were sometimes awkwardly

afraid that they might appear rustic to his New York eyes. He passed for a young man who had seen a great deal of the world, and his natural shrewdness soon showed him the real poverty and barrenness of the natures which underlay the veneer of attempted sophistication.

"They are running a bluff as much as I am!" he expressed it to himself. "We're all in the same boat!"

He was so far away in these triumphant and acrid meditations that he did not hear Francesca come into the room, and, when she spoke to him, he started and looked at her changed aspect for a moment with unrecognizing eyes. Her glistening black hair was parted smoothly over her low forehead and braided in a wide, basket-like coil at the nape of her neck. A home-made dress of cheap pink woolen stuff came up close about her chin. She wore a large necklace of white glass beads.

The two looked at each other in silence; then the girl turned very pale, and her hand went trembling to her lips.

"What is it, Carlo?" she asked in a loud whisper, like a frightened child.

The young man roused himself, and going over to her, put his arm around her.

"*Charlie!*" he corrected, with an irritation but half facetious. "There's nothing the matter. Put on your things, and let's go for a walk. I want to see if I've forgotten how fresh air feels."

The girl continued standing, her dark eyes wide in a misery so lamentable that the other was moved to pity.

"My, how pretty you are in your new dress! I'd 'most forgotten what a good-looking sweetheart I have back here in the city." He kissed her affectionately, and patted her smooth hair. "Just you wait till I'm a rich man, and you'll see the pretty things you'll have!"

The caress and the kind words seemed to free the girl from the prison of wo which had shut her in, and she flung her arms about his neck with her old ardor.

"I don't care if you're rich or poor, or sick or well, or anything—or anything! It wouldn't make any difference to me—how could it? I don't care about a thing but just—but just—oh, Carlo, you don't know what you are to me—heaven, earth, everything! I want to care less for anything of the world, to be good so that we can grow better together. I never could see any reason for being good before, except that it was right, and that's no reason for anybody but saints or dead people; but now I know the reason. It's so that you can be what God meant you to be!"

The man shivered as he looked at her, the lightness of his mobile, nervous face stricken for a moment into an aspect of startled awe: He held her close while he drew a long breath, and then released her, saying in a cheerful tone of reaction:

"Now go along, there's a good girl, and get your things on."

As they descended the dark stairs he was almost suffocated by the strong smell of garlic and bad tobacco. He was about to make some impatient exclamation when Francesca stopped him on a landing.

"Don't you remember?" she asked, with a tremulous playfulness.

Charlie faced her in the dusk.

"Remember?" he said vaguely. "What?"

"No matter!" said the girl, disheartened, and they went on down the stairs, in silence. At the foot recollection came to him suddenly.

"Oh, I know!" he cried. "Taking toll on the landings, you mean. I *had* forgotten! We'll have to do that on the way up, after we come in. How we did use to stop on every one!"

But when they came in he forgot again, and kissed her good night in the lower hall, as he had done in the summer-time.

As he walked away from the house, his step quickened perceptibly, and he thrust his hands into his pockets with a sigh of relief. The walk had not been a success, although the moon was out brightly. In the first place, Francesca had nearly perished of the cold, and had finally confessed that she owned no warmer wraps than those she wore. Charlie had said he would send up a set of furs in the morning, but she had insisted that Aunt Giuseppina would not allow it.

"Perhaps, Charlie—when—if we are married soon——" she had said shyly.

The man had been horrified at the chilling start that her words gave him. He had stopped a boastful report of his success in his business, and had answered her next questions abstractedly.

Then he had been obliged to confess that he had not sought out Uncle Matteo in Wranston.

"Why, he keeps a fruit-store!" he said in indignant and complete excuse.

"Yes, so we've always heard," Francesca answered with innocent pride. "A real fruit-store, and he makes a great deal of money—as much as a thousand dollars a year."

The American had felt a sudden, sickening realization of the world-wide chasm which separated his new ideas and standards from Francesca's. She could never understand, she could never learn.

"She not only couldn't run a bluff if she wanted to, but she could never see any reason why she ought to," he cried to himself, with vexed annoyance at the discomposure she would make in his new plans.

His mind ran off from her at this point into a thousand shifting and interlacing projects. His warm reception by the head of the firm had assured him that his success in the small Middle-Western city was appreciated. He was to lunch the next day with the second partner and the head—he who four years ago was just struggling up from a small position as salesman on the East Side. He planned conversations with the young people of Wranston, "the crowd," as they called themselves vaguely, or sometimes even jocosely, "the gang," and tried to devise ways by which he could bring in the fact that he had lunched at the Gotham Club with the head of his firm.

This made him think that they would expect him to tell them all about the theaters and other events of city life. It had been understood, with a certain harmlessly open insinuation, that his trip to New York was only ostensibly upon business, and that he was really going East to see the sights.

He began reading the sign-boards to see what was on at the theaters. Noting the number of attractions, he calculated that he would have but five evenings free from business. Suddenly he thought again of Francesca. If he went to the theater, when could he see her? He rejected, before he formulated it, the possibility of taking her with him. She had nothing smart enough to wear. He shuddered at the thought of being seen by one of the firm with Francesca in the pink dress she had worn that evening. If she could only always look as she had when he first came in!

The vision rose before him, and he felt a sudden longing to have her again in his arms. Dear little Francesca! That was where she belonged! He had by no means a respectful imagination, and he did not hesitate to run over in his mind the girls he knew in Wranston, trying to think what they would be like if he could treat them as he did Francesca; but the thought brought him around a circle again to the soft, ardent eyes of the Italian girl. He even laughed as he thought of Maggie Wright, and how it would seem to kiss her. He would like to kiss her, but it would be for the triumph it signified over her will-power and shrewd, prudent discretion; whereas Francesca——!

It occurred to him that he had not made her very happy, the first evening he had spent with her. Poor child! She had probably been looking forward so eagerly to it. He wondered if it were too late to go back and be a little kinder to her; but his watch showed him half past eleven, and he thought of Aunt Giuseppina, the grim, disapproving guardian—the Hindu idol as he called her, because of the dangling and gaudy ornaments she wore. He would go back the next evening, and make Francesca happier than she ever had been.

But the next evening, at the first sign of tenderness on his part, Francesca's overwrought heart carried her away into a long and pitiful appeal for sympathy. Zia Giuseppina was so cruel! The relatives in Italy had arranged a marriage there for her—a marriage with a distant cousin whom she had not seen since she was a little girl, and Aunt Giuseppina was coaxing, and urging, and commanding, and imploring her to go back to Italy and marry to suit her family. Of course she didn't for a moment even

dream of consenting; but it made life very hard to bear, day after day, all alone with Aunt Giuseppina, and Charlie so far away!

Charlie sat transfixed with emotions so varied that they oppressed his breathing. He stared in a blank bewilderment at the agitated girl pouring out her heart to him. When she had finished, and was sobbing on his shoulder, he looked past her at a madly whirling and shifting future. He never knew what he said then, or during the rest of the evening, except that he spoke in matter, but not in manner, as Francesca would have him. He seemed to be breathlessly trying to outdistance some thought that was close upon him, and when he descended the stairs he hurried down three steps at a time.

At his hotel he found a joint letter from "the crowd" written to him after the sleigh-ride. As he thought, the party had ended around a chafing-dish in the Wrights' prosperous house. Maggie Wright was evidently the originator of the idea, for the introduction was in her hand, and hers was the last of the jocular, familiar greetings.

Charlie stood for a long time with the letter in his hand, seeing first the hearty, well-fed, trivial young people gathered about the table, and then Francesca's dark eyes, raised to him in a half-conscious, distressed questioning. He felt very unhappy, himself.

(To be concluded.)

MOONSHINE

BY DOROTHY CANFIELD

AUTHOR OF "A PHILANTHROPIC HONEYMOON"

IN TWO PARTS—PART II

ON Charlie's next trip to New York, the first week in January, Maggie Wright threatened laughingly to make him escort her East. She had long been meaning to visit a boarding-school friend in Durwood, and this might be a good time. There was a certain amount of the half rough, half sentimental sparring which had come to be their conversation, before the young business man could induce her to give up the scheme.

"I'll have a hard enough time with Fanny, without anybody else butting in," he said to himself, more crudely than he had come, of late, to formulate his thoughts.

But, contrary to his expectations, he did not have a hard time with Francesca. She was very pale and quiet, docile to a pitiable degree, and let him do exactly as he pleased. He thought she was not well, and, moved partly by pity, partly by relief that she was so much more reasonable than he had feared, he was kinder to her than he had been. She sometimes sat for a long time, quite still, looking at him with a wide, fixed gaze, full of some significance he could not fathom. She answered his questions as quietly and apathetically as she did everything else, scarcely seeming to know what she said. "Yes, Aunt Giuseppina was still talking about the marriage in Italy. Uncle Matteo was coming on from Wranston in a month or two on his way to Genoa. Yes, she was quite well. No, she had not noticed that she was so much paler than usual. Yes, she was working hard at her embroidery."

A fleeting recollection came into Charlie's mind of once when he had kissed the color into her cheeks, on one of their rambling walks. It seemed a long time ago. He wondered if she would like to have him do it now, but she drooped so listlessly upon her red plush chair that he felt it useless to try to arouse her. Before the end of his visit he even felt aggrieved that she was so cold to him, presenting her lips for his good-night kiss like one in a dream. Aunt Giuseppina was entirely and ominously invisible.

Maggie Wright wrote him a note or two in her large, dashing hand, making various childishly sly insinuations about the hot time he was giving the old town. He read them as though they came from another world, his heart filled with a dull ache which he could not analyze.

"I'm not acting right to Fanny," he told himself vaguely, "and it makes me feel as mean as the devil. She's not very well, I don't believe."

He felt the need of something to restore his peace of mind, and that evening, his last in the city, he went to Francesca's, resolved to carry away a recollection that would salve his conscience.

When she opened the door for him, he took the girl in his arms and kissed her a great many times.

"You sort o' forget what it's like to have a real beau, now I'm away so much," he said, half earnestly. Holding her off at arm's length a moment later, he was startled by the change in her. For the space of three or four long breaths she looked like one risen from the dead, with so vivid a return of vitality that she seemed to radiate a conscious and resplendent joy of life. It was like a vision. She seemed scarcely to be human.

And then, with a swift change, her eyes became intolerable to him by their piercing questioning, fixed on him with a despairing intensity that made him drop his hands from her shoulders and stand facing her in a miserable uncertainty. The tension became unendurable; he felt that he must cry out from a wretched consciousness of self-condemnation, vague but unbearable.

"Why, Fanny," he said, trying to caress her, "how strange you look at me. Turn around and see how bright the moonlight comes in the window. We've had some good times in the moonlight, haven't we?"

The icy rigidity of the girl's pose was broken by a long, gasping breath, and she frightened the man by bursting into a rending tempest of sobs. He tried to calm her; he tried to make her say what troubled her; he tried to hold her quiet in his arms; but her agony of weeping shook him, too, until his tired and overwrought nerves were quivering in painful agitation. Once she said, incoherently: "You see—how I am with you—even when I cry—for what I am crying now—I have only you to go to—even now—even now——"

"But why *do* you cry so, Fanny? Come, stop! Get hold of yourself! Tell me what is the matter. You mustn't mind my being sort o' absent-minded at times. I have a lot to think of in my business."

Although he spoke excusingly, he felt, springing instantly in his heart, an injured idea that it was really hard on him at the end of a week's work to treat him like this. He controlled, however, his rising irritation with the ungoverned, undisciplined creature in his arms, and tried again to lead her to the window to see the moon. At this she resisted him with a sudden fierceness, pulling away from him altogether and crying out wildly: "No—No—No! I never want to see the moon again!"

Moodily, Charlie went alone to the window, and stood with his back to her, wondering what Aunt Giuseppina thought of the commotion. It needed only the arrival of that untamed old termagant to complete the evening, he thought. But the little room was intensely quiet except for Francesca's sobs, which grew gradually fainter and fainter. When they stopped he turned about and saw her sitting quiet, her swollen, tear-stained face lying against the back of the hideous chair, her whole body limp in the abandon of exhaustion.

"I'm sorry you feel so bad about something, Fanny, dear," he said in a tone which he felt to be very kind, under the circumstances, "but if you won't tell me what it is, I can't fix it for you, can I?"

Francesca did not stir or raise her eyes.

"And I suppose you know, Francesca, this is my last evening here this visit."

The girl nodded faintly.

"I'm sorry I've had to spend it in this way," he went on, drawing out his watch. "I've got to go now, dear. I hope you'll be better when I come back to New York the next time."

He bent over and kissed her cheek, flaming with fever and glazed with dried tears. "Good-by," he said, and waited for a moment. He felt that she expected him to say something comforting about Aunt Giuseppina's persecution. He really wished to say something. He was very sorry for her. But a curious choking perversity held him silent.

As he groped his way down the stairs, he said to himself excusingly: "I won't let on how I feel about that, but I won't put myself out to let on I feel different from what I do. Good Lord! How she did cry! These dagos have got the most awful sensitive feelings! I guess she'd pretty nearly die if I gave her the go-by. Here's where Charlie Devlin's got to come up to the mark."

Following this conviction, he sent her more frequent letters than he had during the winter, and tried to write more affectionately. He was so keyed up nervously that this was easy for him, his overwrought condition making him add, spontaneously, an unnatural emphasis to whatever he did. He never had succeeded so brilliantly in business as he did during the next two months, seeming to carry all before him by sheer nervous energy.

His relations with Maggie Wright grew more and more exciting. "The crowd" began joking the two and making more or less open allusions to old

Mr. Wright's interest in Charlie's business prospects. One of "the boys," as the shrewd, stirring young business men called themselves, asked Charlie seriously if he were engaged to Maggie, and, after listening to his denials, returned mocking and jocular professions of disbelief.

Sometimes the young man asked himself, in a sort of fury of perplexity, "I'd like to know where I'm coming out at in this?" but he felt too breathless, too desperately hurried in some mysterious way, to think connectedly. Francesca wrote from time to time, but she had never learned to write English well, although she spoke it so fluently, and the quaint stiffness of her inappropriate phrases gave him little knowledge of what she was feeling and little actual sense of her reality.

II

WHEN he went East in March, Maggie Wright went on the same train, the joking crowd seeing them off, with broad, innocent innuendos. "This is only a dress rehearsal of the real event," some one called out, as the train began to carry them away from their tormentors. "Aren't they the *meanest* things!" exclaimed Maggie, in a quickly evaporating indignation, settling herself for the long trip.

At the end of the journey, Charlie escorted Maggie to her friend's house in Durwood. She was naively proud to show him how magnificent a house it was. She introduced him lightly to the family as "one of my Wranston friends —only he's a real New Yorker. He came on the same train with me to take care of me." And then to him heartily: "Honestly, Charlie, I've had a perfectly lovely time. I'm ever so much obliged to you. Don't forget you're going to take me to the theater to-night. I'll be ready early."

The young man raised his hat with a bow and took himself off, sustained as far as the street by the consciousness that he probably looked very tall and stylish, seen from the windows of the house. At the gate he paused, so shaken by uncertainty of his course that he could scarcely bring himself to determine what his next step should be. Finally he decided, in desperation, to put Francesca out of his mind for a day or two until he could have time to think how he should meet her. The feeling that she was there, inexorably waiting for him, made him move uneasily in his seat in the train, as though in an attempt to shift a heavy physical burden. But he posed before his mental mirror with virtuous airs. "I'm not going to go back on a little girl that thinks as much of me as she does," he said, in answer to an unformulated thought.

Then his mind went back to Maggie Wright and how he felt strung up to forceful action by her unspoken demands on him.

"A fellow would *have* to make good, or it'd be all over with her. She keeps you up to the mark all right, all right! Anybody that marries her has just *got* to get on, that's all there would be to it! She'd keep you on the hump till you'd won out, and it's being on the hump that counts in this world. Now, Francesca—there's nothing to live up to, there. She wouldn't care *what* you did—the firm could give you the good-by hand and she'd just pity you; but I see Maggie from here, if a fellow came home and said he'd lost out. He'd hustle right around and win something or kill himself!"

Although the quivering tension of his nerves needed no stimulant at that time, he felt, half consciously, the necessity for such merciless spurring in moments of jaded depression, if he were to conduct his life with the steady triumph he coveted.

"Francesca's like sitting on a park bench in the moonlight and feeling as though you'd never stir again in the world; and Maggie is like a cold winter day on the ice, when you've got to keep going *fast* or you'll fall down and break your neck or freeze to death." In this way Charlie finally summed up the situation.

All day, through his business, there ran this conception of Maggie, and when she went with him to the theater she looked as though she had dressed for the rôle. Her light brown hair was elaborately waved and burnished, every floating strand confined by an invisible net, applied with the wooden tightness of the

professional hairdresser. Her red dress was obviously a city production, although he knew the city must have been Chicago. She breathed the air of the metropolis with an eager zest in the hurrying crowds, and a crude pleasure in the triumphant comparison of her own toilet and good looks with those of the other women.

During the supper afterward, at a fashionable restaurant, glittering with light, and filled with the smell of delicate food, fading flowers, and perfumed laces, she seemed positively to give forth actual rays of brilliant self-satisfaction. Charlie admired her immensely, and the more because he saw other men looking at her. He was very careful in helping her on with her wrap and took great pains not to betray the fact that the experience was as new to him as to her.

Late as it was, there was the usual crowd on the ferry as they started back to Durwood, and he showed his gallantry by securing two seats and holding them against all comers. The ice in the upper river was breaking and, after crashing and grinding its way for some time, the ferry-boat came to a dislocated and jerky halt and began floating aimlessly about. Charlie left his companion to investigate and returned with the news that the steering-gear had broken, and that they must send up distress signals for tugboats.

"My land!" cried the girl, "it'll be awful late when we get to Durwood, won't it?"

Charlie looked at his watch. "It's two o'clock now," he said. "We won't be home till nearly four."

"We won't be home till morning!" she chanted irresponsibly. Her eyes were very bright. She fell to questioning him about his business, showing, through all the excitement of the evening, a shrewdness that made him remember her father. During the long wait until the tugboats arrived to the rescue they sat in a corner of the brightly lighted saloon and talked in low voices, occasionally laughing nervously. They had a singular feeling of perverse intimacy, in the midst of the sleepy passengers, and yet quite alone with each other. Their eyes met with the effect of crossing electric wires, and yet they knew that to outsiders they had the aspect of merely casual acquaintances. Sometimes they looked at each other for a long time in silence, shifting their eyes restlessly under each other's scrutiny, and yet unable to turn them in another direction. The flush on Maggie Wright's cheeks grew deeper and the red of her lips was like a stain.

There was a faint hint of dawn in the sky as finally they stood before the door, Maggie fumbling with the key; but when they were inside, the hall was quite dark except for a tip of gas burning yellow above them. They had been together for many hours, but this was the first moment they had been really alone.

"Good night, Charlie," said the girl, holding out her hand. Her teeth showed white between her lips, half open in a smile, and her eyes glittered in the faint light with a brilliance which made the man dizzy. He looked at her hard and made a sudden rush to put his arms about her, but she was quicker than he, and darted around the hall table, setting it as a barrier between them.

"No, you don't!" she said, shaking her head at him knowingly. "Not *yet* awhile, anyhow." They faced each other in silence, the girl looking at him in harmlessly unabashed effrontery. On the landing there was a rustling stir and a large clock solemnly boomed out four strokes. Maggie evidently expected him to say something, but he was silent. He was almost deprived of any conscious thoughts at all. He was chiefly aware that he was very, very tired and that he would like to sit down. Maggie stirred him from this sudden apathy by continuing, "Not *yet,* I say, but if you make good——" She paused again, smiling brilliantly at him.

Charlie did not speak. A curious, sickening revulsion was rising in his throat. "Here, you can kiss my hand if you want to," went on the girl, extending her arm across the table to him. He bent over and placed his lips upon her hand, and continued afterward holding it vaguely. "And if you make good," she said with a sudden tender intonation, "why, I'll deliver the goods!"

The man heard her as from a great

distance. He was realizing the extreme significance of her remark. His fatigue grew upon him with an anticipatory ache. He saw a long vista of years before him, filled with the necessity to answer and satisfy this imperious and insistent demand. He felt a sudden horrifying doubt as to his capacity to come up to this inexorable and obdurate expectation, and a beaten and spiritless foreknowledge of the deathlike bitterness that failure would mean.

The girl's shrewd eyes took in one meaning of his altered aspect. She felt that she no longer needed the table between them. Quitting this shelter, she advanced boldly to him as he stood with hanging head, and struck her hand familiarly, like a man, upon his shoulder. There was a genuine note of rough kindness and affection in her voice as she said:

"Oh! cheer up, Charlie! Don't be so afraid! You'll make good all right. Why, see here, I *want* you to—I'll *make* you make good! How's that for a bargain? Now, you run along and get some sleep. You're all knocked out."

She held out her hand again with confident security in his change of mood. Indeed he had no desire to kiss her this time. She looked terrifying to him, her color still high, her coiffure still crisply carved in hard, waving lines. He felt himself pale, disheveled, exhausted, unable to cope with her, and turned away without a word. She laughed a little at this, and called after him a final heartening word.

"Don't you worry, Charlie boy; you'll make good all right. I'll *see* that you do!"

III

On the train Charlie sank into a seat in a huddle, indifferently conscious that the conductor would probably think him drunk. Streaks of clear dawn were beginning to show, and when he roused himself to take the ferry it was quite light. He noticed that it was just six o'clock—the hour that Francesca arose to begin her long day of embroidery. He remembered her saying how angry Aunt Giuseppina was if breakfast was later than half after six. It suddenly occurred to him that he would go and see her now instead of waiting. For an instant he doubted, hesitating to show his crumpled linen and pale, unshaven face; but then he said to himself wearily: "Good Lord! That's all Francesca's good for—to take me as I am. If I've got her on my hands, I might as well take what comfort I can in her."

Although the expression was harsh, the thought back of it was curiously and infinitely soothing to his drawn and excited nerves. He fell to picturing his welcome. Francesca, in her joy at seeing him again, would forget all about the awkward way he had left her. It was, in fact, quite an inspiration as to the best way of making up the half quarrel in which they had separated. He had dreaded seeing her for the first time. This would be an excellent expedient for bridging over that uncertain moment, to surprise her utterly.

The idea of Francesca and all that she stood for was like salvation to him. With all his keen longing for her physical presence there came into his mind, overwrought and vagrant, some fragments of an old church chant he had learned and forgotten by the time he was ten, "How vain is all the world, save only Love and Truth." What bound him, after all, to the Juggernaut wheels of progress in Wranston?—what was the use of living only to beat some one else?

As he approached the house he looked up at her window. A light showed palely in the bright dawn. They were probably just finishing breakfast. He felt a stirring of tenderness to think of her joy, and a real and surprising pleasure to think of the room where he would be shut away from the snowy morning and warmed by the ardor of Francesca's devotion. It seemed to him that he could get a rest from the confusion of thought which had so beset him for the last weeks. He put Maggie out of his mind with the same despairing certainty of a problem insoluble with which he had before turned his thoughts away from Francesca. As he passed the place on the stairs where the Italian girl had rushed to meet him before, he quickened his steps, and his heart began to beat faster. He forgot to think; he could only hurry to the door and knock on it

with a hand trembling with nervous excitement.

Aunt Giuseppina opened to him, unchanging as the hills, in her brilliant costume. At the sight of him a bright and alarming flame shot into her hard, black eyes.

"You no getta Francesca's letter?" she asked.

Charlie shook his head impatiently, looking past her into a room quite empty. The old woman drew a long breath and began speaking in her slow, broken English, which she took an infinity of pains to make excessively intelligible. She spoke with a ruthless zest and relish in her words that pointed them like so many knives.

Charlie heard her in a dismayed astonishment that knew no bounds. When she finished, he stared at her in a passion of incredulity.

"It's not true!" he cried. "You've got her here somewhere! She hasn't gone!"

The old woman nodded her head innumerable times.

"But she was engaged to me!" he said in a protest he dared not make as emphatic as he felt, under the denouncing eyes of the aunt. "She shouldn't have gone off this way! She needn't have believed her uncle's stories about me in Wranston."

Aunt Giuseppina said with a grim satisfaction: "When next I hear she will be married to an Italian, a good man who will love her."

"But she was to marry *me!*" Charlie repeated. Aunt Giuseppina looked at him, lowering and menacing, and began muttering unintelligible, animal-like exclamations, of which he could make nothing.

"I loved her," he went on, half to himself, putting his hand to his head, as though to make sure of one fact in all the mad confusion of emotion that overwhelmed him and made him lean weakly against the wall. Aunt Giuseppina stopped her mutterings and looked at him in a black and challenged attention.

"Why, yes," he said, this time to her —"why, yes, I loved her."

At this the old woman became concisely and terribly articulate, advancing upon him with so furious a face of indignation that he fell back outside the door.

"You lie!" said Aunt Giuseppina. "Get out!"

She slammed the door in his face and he was left in almost total darkness. He said to himself: "Why, I am free! Just what I wished has happened. This is all over. I need never come here again. I will never see that hideous old hag again. Yes, I am free! I can go back to Maggie."

He began the descent, feeling his way slowly. "Francesca is gone—she is gone," he said, and stopped short upon the first landing, a rush of recollections overpowering him.

"I never broke with her. I never said an unkind word to her," he went on, as he groped his way down the next flight. "I would have stuck by her if she'd 'a' stayed."

His foot struck hard upon the boards, and he saw that he was on another landing. He stopped for a moment, breathing hard. It was very dark, so dark that he could not have seen Francesca if she had been there. He flung out his arms wildly and hit his hand upon the corner of the molding. He felt the blood begin to trickle down his finger, but no pain went with the sensation. "What the devil makes me feel so?" he quavered petulantly, as he went on down the stairs. "I couldn't have cared for her as much as this and wanted to get rid of her—could I? I'm free. I'll be the richest man in Wranston, and Maggie——"

He found himself upon the last landing, shivering uncontrollably in a mounting agitation. "Aw, what's the *matter* wid me?" he cried aloud, his East Side roughness returning to him with his whirling emotion. "If she'd 'a' been there, smellin' o' garlic, wouldn't I ha' wanted to chuck her and get out?" He brandished this speech like an impotent weapon against the cold horror which crept inexorably upon him as he went staggering down the last flight of stairs.

When he reached the place in the entry-way where they had always said good-by, he stopped, the thick throbbing of his heart suffocating him, and

snatched at another momentary and futile defense against the furious commotion in his brain.

"Hell! How this place does stink!" he cried, and burst open the outer door.

He stepped out from the ill-smelling darkness of the lower hall into a crisp winter morning. The sun shone upon the newly fallen powder of snow with a bright, hard light, and the cold reflections dazzled him for a moment. He could hardly realize that he was free. He told himself that the consciousness of bondage had weighed upon him so long that he would need time to learn to recognize his liberty, his freedom to advance, unchecked, in the path which circumstances and his own will had marked out for him. He noticed that he was very much excited, his muscles quivering, his breath coming fast, and his knees shaking under him.

As he entered the park he looked absently toward the west and saw the fainting ghost of the moon still hanging pale above the trees. Before he could realize of what it reminded him, he was fairly staggered by the acute and rending sharpness of regret which pierced him like a sudden thrust to the heart. He stopped short on the icy walk and caught at a bench as though he had been stricken down with an unendurable physical agony. The whiteness of his upturned face seemed a reflection from the pale shadow which hung like a fading cloud in the cold brilliance of the sky.

Like a breath of vapor, enclosed in an invisible ring, it wavered mistily before his eyes. He fixed his gaze upon it with a straining intensity as though the sight were the last of his mortal life—as though the vision of what the world would be, when that vanished, sickened him with an unbearable and unavailing despair of regret.

The sun rose higher, and, like a dissolving snowflake, the moon melted from the sky.

THE END